

## Secretary Rice traveling to the Middle East and Europe

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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(3:20 p.m. EST)

**SECRETARY RICE:** Good afternoon. Well, to my traveling party, it's time to hit the road again. I know you've been chomping at the bit. We've been home a whole two weeks or something like that. So it's time to go. I'm making my third trip to the Middle East and my fourth to Europe since taking office. And it's going to be a time -- it's a good time to go to the Middle East because we and our allies have accomplished a lot over the last several months.

I think we have a renewed consensus with our European partners on support for freedom and cooperation in Iraq. We have free elections and a new government in Iraq. We have elections coming in Afghanistan. There have been democratic elections in Lebanon and in the Palestinian Authority, and we have put forward a proposal for increased assistance to the Palestinian Authority; the beginnings of constitutional reform in Egypt; municipal elections in Saudi, which the next time we, of course, hope will include women. And women have won the right to vote in Kuwait. I'm going to visit Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the territories, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and then on to Brussels and London.

Obviously, the primary goal for going to Israel and to the Palestinian territories at this time is to talk with the parties about the preparations for the very important and historic disengagement from the Gaza that is about to take place. I have had very close consultations and discussions with Jim Wolfensohn who is in the region right now with General Ward, who is also in the region. And we've been discussing the way forward. So I look forward to joining up with them and being able to discuss this directly with the parties. Assistant Secretary Welch and NSC Deputy National Security Advisor Elliott Abrams are currently in the region working on these issues in advance of my trip. But this will be very much focused on the preparations for the Gaza withdrawal.

After that, I will go on to Jordan and Egypt and Saudi Arabia where I can review our excellent bilateral relations with each of those countries and our cooperation in the war on terrorism. In some cases, there are a number of economic issues to discuss as well, and of course reform and the democratization process will be very much a part of the agenda and topic of discussion as well. And I hope to talk with all of these nations about the changes that are sweeping the region and about their responsibilities as very central members of the Arab world to promote particularly change in the Middle East and to promote the opportunity we have before us between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

I'm going to deliver a policy speech in Cairo, and I will go on then to Brussels to represent the United States at an International Conference on Iraq, which we, the EU, and Iraqis are co-sponsoring. It is a conference to talk about political support for Iraq, to talk about the way forward for Iraq. There will be a huge number of countries there; I think the latest number is something like 80 countries, so that's a very big conference. And then in London, this is the regular Ministerial meeting of the G-8 in preparation for the Heads of State Summit at Gleneagles. So I'm looking forward to it, and we leave on Friday afternoon.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, looking ahead to your trip, President Mubarak's plan to open up Presidential elections severely limits the ability of independent candidates to run, partly by requiring them to get rather high numbers of endorsements from a parliament that, as you well know, is dominated by the ruling party.

Why is this acceptable to the United States that there should be such a high bar on independent candidates?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we cannot say strongly enough that what we are interested in is a process that is open and fair in all electoral processes around the world. And we've had this discussion with the Egyptian Government; but of course, this is an important first step that they are taking. Contested Presidential elections is an important step for a country that has not had them before.

It is also important that the Egyptian Government recognize that a lot of people are going to be watching what happens in these elections. A lot of people are going to be watching whether or not there is access to the government-controlled press for people who run for office. There will be, hopefully, international observers there to watch the electoral process. And an atmosphere should be created in which those who are running for office feel that they can freely contest for the presidency.

But this is not the last step in Egyptian reform. This is going to have to be a process. Democracy isn't a single-day event. It is a process as it unfolds and they've taken an important first step. But we'll continue to have discussions with them about making these elections open and free and to make it as big a step as they possibly can.

**QUESTION:** Is it not flawed if everyone can't run?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Again, this is a process of moving forward; and sometimes we have to stop and look at where we are and where we've been. And where we've been in Egypt is that there's been no contestation in effect for the presidency. And there have been some changes to the constitution. Is it enough? I think on an absolute scale, no. More needs to be done. But on a scale of the trend line here is a positive development, and it's one that we're going to encourage. And we're going to encourage that they take this development, this step, and push it as far as they possibly can so that as the reforms continue, Egypt will eventually get to completely open and contested elections.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Secretary Rice, today the White House and the Pentagon have spoken about polls that show that there's a decline in public support for the war in Iraq. How concerned are you about this? What are you going to do to try to remind them of what you've said, that people should not be complacent or impatient?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Right. Well, this is hard; and I think that everybody knows that the American people have been asked to support a complex and difficult task in trying to help the Iraqis in overthrowing a dictator, then to create a viable and united and democratically -- democratically based state. This is hard work. And it is work that requires that we, as Americans, reach down in ourselves and look for the kind of patience and generosity that we have exhibited in the past in understanding that democracy takes time.

I'm going to, like I think all members of the Administration, perhaps try to do more to get out to the public to talk about what it is we are trying to achieve and what it is we are achieving.

When we talk about generational change in Iraq, it does not mean that the American contribution to that change has to look exactly as it does today for a generation. The Iraqis are becoming more and more capable every day of handling their own affairs. The political situation and their administrative role is almost completely now Iraqi. So it will, too, be with their security forces.

And if you talk to the people who are doing the training of the security forces, they will tell you that they are getting better. They are now engaged in joint activities with us. But they've done some things completely on their own. For instance, they protected the elections almost completely on their own. If you look at the activities they've been engaged in Baghdad, some 40,000 of them, they have really been the lead.

This should be a signal to the American people that our contribution to security is one that is being taken over by the Iraqis. And we're not talking about the Iraqis having to deal with, you know, a raging army coming at them. We're talking about counterterrorist operations. They are being trained for that.

So I think the message would be that, yes, we need to have patience but, yes, we also understand that this cannot be an American enterprise or a coalition enterprise for the long term; it has to be an Iraqi enterprise. And I would just note in that regard that they are continuing to make progress on the political front. There is reporting today, though I'd have to say that I haven't been able independently to verify it -- there's reporting today that they believe they've, perhaps, reached a compromise between Sunnis and the others about how they might move forward on a constitutional commission. If that is indeed the case, it's just another step that the Iraqis have taken along their political road.

John.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, on Iraq, what do you say to the growing chorus of voices on Capitol Hill, including some Republicans who have been strong supporters of the war that say the administration needs to present at least the beginnings of an exit strategy. And you've got some very worried voices. You have people like Lindsey Graham, who said we're going to lose this war if we don't watch it. What do you say to them?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I would say that what we should look for is a success strategy because the United States is in Iraq because it is central to our security, long-term security. It is essential to a different kind of Middle East. It's essential to having a regime there that can be an anchor for that different kind of Middle East. It is a very different Middle East with Saddam Hussein gone. And now we are in the process of trying to help the Iraqis to put in place a viable and democratic state on the ruins of that old tyranny.

Now, I do think that we owe it to the American people to say again and again that this is not going to be an American enterprise for the long term. This is going to be an Iraqi enterprise. Whether you talk about who's going to provide security or who's going to be involved in the politics, it will be Iraqi.

They are already in charge of their own politics. We will not celebrate the transfer of sovereignty -- the one-year anniversary of the transfer of sovereignty until next week. It's been less than a year since we transferred sovereignty. They have elected a government, they will now write a constitution, they are then going to have permanent elections and that creates a fundamentally different political context for the Iraqis themselves. Their security forces are being trained, they're taking over more and more of the effort.

Now, they are facing a tough insurgency that's made up, we believe, more and more of foreign terrorists -- I mean, more and more from what you're seeing, foreign terrorists prying their wares with suicide bombings and the like. And so a relatively few people can wreak a lot of mayhem on the Iraqi people.

But the security forces and their ability to fight -- it depends on intelligence, it depends on the population being able to support them, and the Iraqis have created the political conditions in which we believe that's going to happen.

So I would say this is not going to be an American enterprise for the long term.

Yes, Anne.

**QUESTION:** It's been a year now since the North Koreans' last participated in the six-way disarmament talks. Do you detect any movement toward a resumption of that process? And can you tell us, what would you do if the North Koreans did return to the table and yet refused to give up their arms? Or what would your options be if they refused to return to the table at all?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, there's a lot of bubbling, as you know, about whether the North Koreans are ready to return to the table or not. And we will see. Until we have a date, we don't have a date. And so we -- it's, you know, since the ball is in the North Korean's court. But I don't like to and I will not engage in a kind of speculation about what we might do under different circumstances; but we've been very clear that the North Koreans have, on the table, a proposal that should be incentive enough for them to come back to the talks in a spirit to actually try and do something constructive. No, it's not enough to just return to the talks. You have to be willing to come back and talk about what the talks are about, and that is the dismantling of the North Korean nuclear program.

The five parties remain committed, and remain consistently committed to a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula, to a message to the North Koreans that they cannot have a nuclear weapon and have integration into the international system; and that has got to continue to be the message. Of course, we are always going to reserve all other alternatives. The Security Council has been mentioned. It's an alternative that is there for the international system. But we don't have a timetable for that, and we believe that the six-party talks still have an opportunity to do what they were designed to do.

Robin.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, the White House today issued a statement very critical of Iran's election, particularly of the unelected few who have dominated power. Does the United States seek the removal of those unelected or support the removal of those unelected few, or are you willing to apply the standard of generational change that you talk about with other countries?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the sad thing about Iran is it's moving backwards, not forward. There are some places where the trend line is moving forward and some places where the trend line is moving in the wrong direction. I think everyone would say that the Iranian system, political system was more open a few years ago than it is now. If you look at the role of the Majlis a few years ago, it was actually a central point for reform. Many of those deputies were then not allowed to run or were somehow kept from running in the next elections. If you looked at the elections that took place before, there was more openness in those elections. So some of this is about trend line, and the Iranians are moving in the wrong direction.

Now, that said, when you have a system in which somebody arbitrarily sits and hand-picks who can run and who cannot run, it's a little hard to see that producing an outcome that is going to lead to improvement in the situation.

We've always said that this is also an issue of the behavior of the Iranian Government; and so we will be watching, along with everybody else, after the Iranian elections take place to see whether or not the Iranians are somehow ready to commit to a course that puts them more in step with what is going on in the region. That means to have their political system move toward greater openness, first of all; secondly, that they are going to live up to their obligations not to try and seek a nuclear weapon under cover of a civilian nuclear power, and that is that they'll take the deal that the E-3 is giving them; third, that they are prepared to be transparent and good neighbors for the new democracies in Afghanistan and Iraq; and fourth, that they are going to get out of the business of supporting terrorist and rejectionist groups, which go right at the heart of what most of the Middle East is now trying to achieve: a peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. And if the Iranians are prepared to start on that course, then that's -- we'd be in a different set of circumstances than we are now.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** (Off mike.)

**SECRETARY RICE:** I had him next. I'll come back.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** Prime Minister Sharon today declined to hold a joint press conference with you when you are there. How would that impact your visit, ma'am?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I don't think I held a joint press conference with Prime Minister Sharon last time, so I don't think it was a matter of --

**QUESTION:** Why would he make such an announcement?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I have no idea. I wasn't even aware that this was an issue, so it's not an issue. I will hold a press availability, which is what I did, I think, the last time that I was in Israel, so I think we're on the same course that we were on the last time. I'll have an extensive discussion with the Prime Minister and I look forward to doing that.

Steve.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, thank you. On Guantanamo, not about the security reasons for having Guantanamo, but just the foreign policy impact. Have you not found in your discussions with especially the

Arab leaders, some of whom you'll be seeing again this week, that Guantanamo makes the pursuit of American foreign policy interests more difficult, even among our friends in the Arab world?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, there are certainly concerns about the whole detainee issue in a number of places, not just in the Arab world, but you know that those concerns have been there too with our allies. And what I try to do when that comes up is to address those concerns, but to address them in helping people to understand that the United States has -- the President of the United States has an obligation, first and foremost, to protect the American people. And that means being able to deal with people that we found on the battlefield. I mean, the people who are under detention are people who we, for the most part, met fighting on the battlefield.

And I remind people too that we have had significant releases from Guantanamo. We have released hundreds of people from Guantanamo, some back to their countries, some we've simply released. We have, in turn, run into a few of them on the battlefield again. And so there is an important balance to be met here and that has to, first and foremost, be concerned about the security of the American people, but it also has to be done in a way in which we are sure that we are carrying out the President's objective, which is -- and the President's guidance, which is that we are in conformance with our international legal obligations and our treaty obligations.

So I try to explain that to people. I know it's hard. It's a different kind of war. We've had to make some very difficult decisions. But when we are three years past September 11, or more than three years now past September 11, it's sometimes easy to forget that we are still in a war in which there is a determined and dedicated and indeed quite skilled extremist movement that is determined to deliver yet another blow to the United States of America and to its allies. And we have to always keep that in mind as we are looking at detainee policies. I would just mention one other thing. We've made a lot of changes in detainee policies, in the review mechanism, as I said, in releasing people; and we'll continue to make those changes.

Oh. I'm sorry. Yeah.

**QUESTION:** This morning Under Secretary of State Nick Burns spoke about the need to move forward with UN reform. As you are well aware, your Ambassador-designate, John Bolton, has as yet to be confirmed by the Senate. Do you believe that Democrats' holding out for these additional documents is a legitimate concern, or do you agree with Republicans that this is an obstructionist manner? If it continues much longer, do you see President Bush pushing, perhaps during the July 4th recess, for a recess appointment?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, it's time to get an up-or-down vote on John Bolton. He has answered questions; they have debated it. I have enormous respect for the deliberative process of the Senate, but I think we're seeing the effect for us of a UN reform process that is moving ahead and moving ahead rather rapidly without the United States having a Permanent Representative at the United Nations. And it's time for us to get him there so that he can shepherd this very important process. And just -- on UN reform, what we want to see -- and this is why it's so important to have a strong voice there -- is we have got to get people focused on what really has to be reformed about the United Nations. I know that there is a lot of interest in Security Council reform; and I think we've signaled now that we are prepared to discuss expansion of the Security Council, to discuss the criteria by which that should happen, to discuss the structure that such Security Council reform might take. And we're having those discussions, and we look forward to exchanging ideas with people as we do that.

But we are not prepared to have Security Council reform sprint out ahead of the other extremely important reforms that have to take place. Management reform, Secretariat reform, peace building, issues about nonproliferation, issues about how we build a democracy fund. These are core to what the UN is, and we are determined that this is going to go forward in a way that draws people's attention and people's commitment to those reform measures, too. We simply will not let Security Council reform sprint out ahead of other reforms.

**QUESTION:** Could I follow-up on that?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes, sure.

**QUESTION:** Trouble still continues to swirl around UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. Do you have confidence in him to lead the UN through this period of --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes. We've worked very closely with him. I have confidence in him. We do want a full and complete investigation of anything that might be there. And I believe that that is under way and we await the results. We await the results but we've worked well with Kofi Annan and expect to continue to do so. Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, you'll be going to Israel at a time when there's a controversy or concern growing over the supply of military technology to China. Can you give us your views on that and tell us what you're going to be telling the Israelis about that?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we have had concerns and I would hope that our Israeli friends would understand that the United States, of course, has responsibility, along with others but we have primary responsibility really for defending in the Pacific. And there is a rising concern here about military modernization in China. And while we recognize and believe very strongly that the goal of everyone has to be to integrate China as fully into the international system as possible and to try to create conditions in which China is a positive

force. It is also entirely appropriate to be concerned that that happen before there is a major military escalation of China's capability.

And so Israel has a responsibility to be sensitive to that, particularly given the close defense cooperation between Israel and the United States. And given that, we have had some very difficult discussions with the Israelis about this. I think they understand now the seriousness of the matter and we'll continue to have those discussions.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, on Uzbekistan. It does seem that there is a tension with the government right now in terms of the government restricting U.S. access to bases. At the same time, you want to push ahead, calling for an independent investigation into the violence there and respect for human rights. How do you balance the two? How do you resolve this with the Uzbek Government where you can still use the bases but forge ahead on those incidents?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, first of all, unequivocally, we called for an independent international investigation, which is the only investigation of Andijan that we think will be credible.

Secondly, yes, we do have important equities in terms of being able to use the bases there. It's been very important to our support -- to support our activities in Afghanistan. And we have arrangements with the Uzbek Government and we continue to hope that we can use those arrangements. I think it's extremely important to understand that we have been, for the last few years, talking to the Karimov Government and urging the Karimov Government to do something about the openness of their political system. The answer to the potential threat of extremism in a country is not to close the system down, but rather to open it up to legitimate and more moderate voices in the political system. And we've continually said that to President Karimov and to his advisors.

And while, of course, as you said, we have these equities, the -- I think the President's made very clear that we believe our long-term strategic goals are served by open political systems and by processes of democratization. And so we continue to press that case.

Yeah, you can follow up.

**QUESTION:** What do you say to the government, the Uzbek Government, does seem to be holding hostage your use of these bases, to your calibration of a message on human rights?

**SECRETARY RICE:** No. I just say it won't work. It won't work.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, what's your reaction about the contacts between the EU's officials and Hamas movement?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I frankly don't know the extent of this. I've read many different stories about it. My understanding is that the EU is fundamentally -- that our EU colleagues fundamentally understand that Hamas cannot be in a position of threatening the peace process with arms and then say that it is a part of the political process. I think that is something that we share.

Now, the United States has not changed its view of Hamas and we do not have contacts with Hamas. I think the best answer here is that there is a democratically elected President in the Palestinian territories, Mahmoud Abbas. They're going to hold, in the near future, further elections in the Palestinian territories. And it is probably best to let Mahmoud Abbas deal with some of the contradictions, let me put it that way, in the political system in the Palestinian territories, recognizing what he himself has often said, which is that you cannot have multiple guns in a state. There has to be one authority and one gun. And I think that's been his position and we certainly agree with him.

I promised you I'd come back. Yes.

**QUESTION:** Thank you, Madame Secretary. I'm just going to follow up on Iran, on the statement that was issued from the White House today. And they said thousands of people, including the reformers and women were barred from taking part in the election. Do you think that will be a fact that will undermine outcome of the result, considering that maybe the frontrunner Rafsanjani will be elected and he already stated that he'd want to open a new page with Washington?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes. Well, the process certainly matters. And when you do have thousands of people and -- well, women as a class and then thousands of people arbitrarily, as far as I can tell, told that they cannot run, it calls into question -- or I can't see how one considers that a "legitimate election."

My point is that whatever happens there, we've long said to the Iranians that we have very big concerns about their behavior. And I think everybody understands what that means. And again, I would just focus on the trend line here, which is simply in the wrong direction.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I think we have time for two more questions.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Okay. Oh, goodness. Now, you're going to do that to me. Okay, I guess. (Laughter.) I have to pick and choose. That's really not fair.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, I wanted to ask you two questions, if I may, about your upcoming trip to the Middle East. The Administration was sharply critical of Syria in recent days. Is there anything you plan to ask of the Egyptians, the Jordanians, or the Saudis on this front, perhaps for help in changing Syrian behavior in Lebanon or on the Iraq border?

And secondly, with the absence of a chief for public diplomacy, is there any way that you plan to use this trip to perhaps fix the U.S. image in the region?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, to the degree that it needs fixing, I don't think I'll manage in one trip, but I'll do my part to try to make our case for what we're doing and for the fact that the United States is simply putting forward the proposition that the people of the Middle East are no different than the people of the rest of the world, that they have the same aspirations for human dignity and liberty, and to be able to say what they think and to choose those who would govern them that people around the world have. And I think that the admission on the part of the United States and on the part of the President that that hasn't always been what the United States has said about the Middle East is enormously important and I'll say that again.

I'll also say again that the United States respects Islam and respects this great religion, believes that those who are using the name of Islam to kill innocents, to frustrate the aspirations of the people of Iraq or Lebanon or of the Palestinian territories through violence, that by no means do we believe that this is the face of Islam; and that Islam is not just respected by the United States, it's practiced in the United States because we believe fundamentally in religious freedom and religious tolerance.

And we do have a public diplomacy effort still underway. And by the way, I would hope that the Senate would also release Dina Powell, who is to be the new Assistant Secretary for Education and Cultural Affairs because she's being held up for what I consider to be unrelated reasons, and it would be very useful to have her here and doing that work.

But yes, I do think that this trip is, in part, an opportunity to communicate with the Arab world, with reformers. I will meet with reformers on a couple of occasions and I'll do what I can in that regard.

As to Syria and Iraq and the states that I'll meet with, yes, we have consistently talked with Egypt and Saudi Arabia and Jordan about what they can do to impress upon the Syrians that they have an obligation to, first of all, to have good relations with their neighbor, which means not creating conditions in which their territory is being used to attack the aspirations of their neighbor, Iraq; and that they have obligations to be fully out of Lebanon, not just their military forces but also their intelligence presence. And I believe that they've been getting a pretty consistent message from the other states in the region because the states that I've mentioned are all desirous of, and indeed anxious for, an improved set of circumstances in the Middle East, most especially on the Palestinian-Israeli situation.

Let's see. All the way in the back. Yes.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Madame Secretary, I wonder if South Caucasus will come up in your European talks. Any new initiatives in terms of democracy or conflict resolution you will discuss with your European colleagues?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes, I do hope to have a chance to discuss with my European colleagues -- and I probably will see Minister Lavrov as well -- to talk about the so-called frozen conflicts, first of all, Nagorno-Karabakh and others, but also to talk about the conditions in the caucuses. A lot has happened, even since I was last there with the Georgian-Russian base agreement. That is a very good thing. And to see how we can all work together for a more peaceful and democratic caucuses region.

One of the issues that I think we have to talk about is if we could get some of these frozen conflicts resolved peacefully then the economic benefits for that region, I think, would be quite dramatic. And so yes, that would be an important issue.

Yeah.

**QUESTION:** I wanted to ask how seriously or what degree of opposition the U.S. really has towards the plans that India and Pakistan have evidently to move forward on this pipeline from Iran and what consequences the U.S. is threatening might flow from that if they do go ahead with it?

**SECRETARY RICE:** We've communicated our concerns to both Pakistan and India about this, but we have very positive relations with Pakistan and India. The really amazing thing is that we have managed to have very positive relations with India that includes an increasing defense cooperation relationship and very positive relationships with Pakistan that includes defense cooperation. And so I think it demonstrates that we are de-linking the India-Pakistan and I think it shows that, in a sense, they are, too, because we're very -- find quite remarkable and very encouraging the move of Pakistan and India toward a greater rapprochement between them and we want to be supportive of those trends.

One thing that is of concern to the countries in that region and we're going to have to have continuing discussions about is the energy situation because these are growing economies (inaudible) the Indian community which has to find energy supply and that's why we have an energy dialogue with the Indians, so that we can help to talk about different forms of energy supply because we fully understand that they need to find it. But we've made our concerns known about this specific circumstance.

**QUESTION:** It is fair to say that you're not likely to move towards sanctions then if they were to go down that path?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I think the -- we are sharing our concerns in a constructive way with them and not in a negative way. All right. I guess I have to go. Thank you very much.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:57 p.m.)